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# Small Town Attitude

Scott Hagensen  
*Western Oregon University*

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Small Town Attitude

By:

Scott Hagensen

Senior Seminar: HST 499

Professor John L. Rector

Western Oregon University

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Readers

Professor Kimberly Jensen

Professor John L. Rector

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In the United States there has always been an issue with the consumption of liquor. There have been many movements focused on prohibiting the manufacture, sale or advertisement of intoxicating liquor, such as temperance and national prohibition from 1919-1933. Temperance is social movement against the use of alcoholic beverages, and prohibition is a law forbidding the sale of alcoholic beverages. In Oregon, there have been many attempts to keep the city of Monmouth dry and the whole state of Oregon dry. These movements aimed at intoxicating liquor were started by Disciples of Christ of Monmouth, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), and many local citizens who wanted the town to remain dry. Monmouth's story of prohibition dates back to 1856, when the town was established.

The town was founded by members of the Disciples of Christ from Monmouth, Illinois. The town's first charter in 1859 prohibited the sale of liquor. In 1880, the law really gained teeth when the charter was revised to read "that all bar rooms, saloons, drinking shops, tippling houses, and all places in which spirituous, vinous, malt or alcoholic liquors are sold are hereby prohibited."<sup>1</sup> This new charter set up an alcohol debate that went on for more than 140 years until 2002, when the city voted to end prohibition.

The debate on prohibition intensified in the 1960s and 1970s. Voters, store owners and the local college students challenged the city of Monmouth to end prohibition. The city council and court refused to compromise on the issue of prohibition, and once again, the people voted in favor of being a dry town. With each referendum, the majority voted in favor of being dry and with each vote that support

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<sup>1</sup> Kyle R Jansson, "The Changing Climate of Oregon's Driest Town," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 102, no. 3 (Fall 2001): 341.

grew. However, Monmouth's status as the last dry town in Oregon was ended by a popular vote in the November 2002 election. Monmouth remained a dry town for the first 140 years of existence because of religious principles that the town was founded on by local people who liked and cherished the idea of living in the only dry town in the state, but this came to an end in 2002, when the town voted to end prohibition out of necessity of having a grocery store in Monmouth and by changing view points of many citizens.

A key historian of the temperance movement at the national level was Ruth Bordin, who wrote about how the WCTU was the leading women's temperance organization and the leading woman's organization in the United States from 1873-1900. In her book *Women and Temperance: The Quest for Power and Liberty, 1873-1900*, she showed that the WCTU was a national voice through which women expressed their views on social and political issues that came about from the abuse of liquor. Supporters of prohibition envisioned a society with less crime, domestic abuse, neglect, and accidents. Supporters believed that prohibition would cause people who lived their lives around saloons and drink to be transformed into better spouses, parents and workers. Bordin's thesis focused on the last quarter of the nineteenth century when the Woman's Christian Temperance Union was the major vehicle through which women developed a changing role for themselves in American society. To help validate her thesis, Bordin pointed out two major roles that the Union played: a national voice through which women expressed their views on social and political issues, and also a vast grass-roots organization that worked for charitable and political solutions to social problems.<sup>2</sup> The one major social

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<sup>2</sup> Ruth Bordin, *Women and Temperance: The Quest for Power and Liberty, 1873-1900* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), xxiv.

problem that Bordin addressed was the liquor issue. Women found temperance as the best way to increase their involvement in public life. At this time in history, women could not vote or partake in political campaigns. The WCTU was aimed at giving women a voice in a man's political world, on the issue of how liquor was destroying the Christian family way of life. Bordin showed that the WCTU effectively manipulated public opinion in support of the Christian way of life that was being destroyed through liquor.

Another perspective on prohibition is presented by historian John E Caswell who looked at the movement for prohibition at the state level. Drawing from his master's thesis he wrote "The Prohibition Movement in Oregon, Part I, 1836-1904" and "The Prohibition Movement in Oregon, Part II, 1904-1915." Caswell's thesis stated that alcohol has always been a part of Oregon, but due to social and political problems created by it Oregon decided to go dry in 1917; however, prohibition was opposed by many who had economic ties with the liquor industry. For example, Caswell looked at the Iowa Code of 1838 that contained an act to prevent the selling of liquor to Native Americans. He said that a fine of \$25-\$100, prison sentence, and restitution to the Indians of whatever goods had been received in the transition were provided.<sup>3</sup> This helps show that early on in Oregon's history there had been liquor related issues. People were taking advantage of Native Americans through unfair trade practices, which were a direct result of liquor. Caswell showed how in May of 1844, Oregon passed the first prohibition law in the United States. Oregon's provisional government enacted a prohibition law

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<sup>3</sup> John E Caswell, "The Prohibition Movement in Oregon, Part I, 1836-1904," *The Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 39 no. 3 (December 1938): 240.

designed to prevent “the introduction, sale and distillation of ardent spirits in Oregon.”<sup>4</sup> This showed that Oregon had a long history of prohibition and was at the forefront of this movement. He used in article in *The Oregonian* in 1870, which read, “Our husbands, brothers, sons, should no longer be exposed to this terrible temptation, and not go down path to sin and bring both soul and body destruction.”<sup>5</sup> He wanted to point out how liquor was tearing up the state. It is easy to see the lives people were living at the time because of the influence of liquor. This influence of liquor caused many social problems, such as destruction of the family, as well as many political problems, such as unfair treaties with Native Americans who signed treaties under the influence of liquor. Caswell also noted that not everyone was for prohibition: “Nine hundred saloons and eighteen breweries in ninety eight towns were closed; many of these were in small towns whose main or only source of revenue was liquor.”<sup>6</sup> This quote is from *The Oregonian* in 1914, one year before state wide prohibition. There was a counteroffensive by farmers of wheat, hops, potatoes and owners and employees of breweries and distilleries who foresaw the economic downfall of prohibition. He showed that if prohibition took place, many towns and business would suffer economically. Caswell explained why Oregon went dry in 1915- because of social and political problems from liquor- but that from an economic stand point many would suffer greatly with the introduction of prohibition.

A book that looks at the first major temperance movement in Oregon is Lucia H. Faxon Additon’s book, *Twenty Eventful Years of the Oregon Woman’s Christian*

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<sup>4</sup> Caswell, 241.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 254.

<sup>6</sup> John E Caswell, "The Prohibition Movement in Oregon, Part II, 1904-1915," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 40, no.1 (December 1939): 80.

*Temperance Union 1880-1900.* Additon wrote to influence public sentiment in the direction of temperance in order to protect Christian and moral values through the WCTU. Throughout her book, Additon showed that WCTU's main goal was to create a temperance bill at the state level to protect Christian and moral values that were being destroyed through alcohol. She wrote about the time period from 1880-1900. During this time, the WCTU agitated the state government for prohibition and liquor control reform. This can be seen in a quote by Additon: "petitions were circulated faithfully by the entire rank and file; lectures delivered, the press utilized, to keep up the agitation towards the legislature."<sup>7</sup> Additon's thesis states, "When we look into the innocent eyes of our boys and then into the faces of some men, and thence to the saloon that has made the difference, we cease to wonder that mother should leave the scared precincts of home and go forth to meet and battle with the destroyer of her treasures."<sup>8</sup> To build upon Addition's thesis, the town of Monmouth saw that if the sale of alcohol was allowed, it would destroy the family and wreck the Christian way of life that many Monmouth residents cherished so dearly. She felt that saloons and alcohol were destroying the way of life for many women and that there need to be a call to stop this destruction through temperance movements.

An article that deals specifically with prohibition in Monmouth is "The Changing Climate of Oregon's Driest Town", by Kyle R. Jansson. This article discusses various movements to repeal the city ordinance that made Monmouth dry. Jansson showed that when there was a vote to repeal prohibition, the town always voted in favor to keep it, because it was Monmouth's most deeply rooted social issue. Jansson's main interest on

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<sup>7</sup> Lucia H Faxon Addition, *Twenty Eventful Years of the Oregon Woman's Christian Temperance Union 1880-1900*. (Portland: Gotshall Printing Company, 1904), 8.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

the issue was to show how Monmouth was able to stay a dry town over the years, despite the numerous attempts to repeal prohibition. His thesis is Monmouth citizens had voted at least twice in favor of statewide prohibition of alcohol and five times in support of local prohibition, and in each case, changing combinations of moral, economic, historical and quality-of-life arguments had been used to justify their position.<sup>9</sup> He looked at the five votes that took place through the years and, surprisingly, even as the rest of the country changed their conservative ways, Monmouth chose to remain dry with greater support of being dry for each vote. An example that shows how Monmouth did not change with the times can be seen in August 1994, when temperance singers joined Monmouth residents to celebrate a century of prohibition. The singers paraded through the city and sang political songs such as “Marching through Rumland” and “Hurray for Prohibition.”<sup>10</sup> Many people came out and supported the temperance singers, showing that after a century of prohibition, there were still strong pro-prohibition forces. The reason for this is that prohibition was initiated by people who wanted to shelter their families in a Christian community, and this idea of a Christian community was the battle cry to keep prohibition every time a vote took place.<sup>11</sup> Monmouth would become the face of prohibition and follow the laws of prohibition until the 21st century.

*Monmouth Oregon: the Saga of a Small American Town* by Scott McArthur explains how and why Monmouth remained dry for the first 147 years of the town’s existence. McArthur shows that Monmouth prohibited the sale of liquor, but it did not prohibit its consumption. His thesis is that Monmouth remained dry for the first 147 years of its existence because some opposed the sale of intoxicants on religious grounds,

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<sup>9</sup> Jansson, 337.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.



others liked the uniqueness of living in the last city in the state to have prohibition, but as the times changed so did the view of many of the residents of Monmouth. An example of the changing view of the residents can be seen when the last grocery store closed in Monmouth in 2002. Many did not like how there was not a grocery store in Monmouth, since residents were forced to drive to Independence to purchase groceries. Many tempered their opinions about prohibition with the prospect of being to able to purchase groceries without driving to the next town.<sup>12</sup> When the town was founded, one of the first things the Disciples of Christ did was make a charter that prevented the sale of intoxicants. From this first charter the religious identity took hold and the people of Monmouth always turned to this when the issue of prohibition was in question.

At the national level there was a call for prohibition. It was no surprise that the United States had become a drunken society, and alcoholism was a major problem. To illustrate how the United States had become a drunken society, in 1900, Americans spent over \$1 billion on alcoholic beverages and only spent \$900 million on meat.<sup>13</sup> Americans were turning their back on the necessities of life and heading to the saloon. Another example to show the need for prohibition at the national level is found at the end of the nineteenth century in Chicago, when the number of saloons equaled the total number of the city's grocery stores.<sup>14</sup> It seemed that alcohol was running wild throughout America, and there was a call for prohibition. The nineteenth-century drunkard's reputation as wife beater, child abuser, and sodden, irresponsible non-provider

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<sup>12</sup> Scott McArthur, *Monmouth Oregon: The Saga of a Small American Town* (Monmouth: Scott McArthur, 2004), 34.

<sup>13</sup> Bordin, 6.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

was not underserved.<sup>15</sup> Women suffered the most from drunkenness, and they were in legal subjection to a drunken husband. Women were vulnerable to the abuses of an alcoholic husband. A woman had no control over their wages and had no claim on their husband's earnings.<sup>16</sup> A husband could drink up his pay and his wife's pay, and the wife had no control over this. Temperance movements that called for prohibition, like the WCTU, would protect women from this abuse. It is important to note, however, that not all husbands were drunkards that abused their wife and family; many were loving, caring and supportive husbands.

Temperance movements have a long and proud history in Oregon and Monmouth. Some of the first people to Oregon and the Willamette Valley were Methodist missionaries who arrived in 1834. These newly arrived missionaries soon founded the Oregon Temperance Society on the eleventh of February, 1836; it was the first organization of whites formed on Oregon soil.<sup>17</sup> In the first Oregon Territorial legislation in 1850, there was a petition to prohibit the introduction, sale and manufacture of all kinds of intoxicating drinks.<sup>18</sup> This petition did not come to law, but was one of the first petitions circulated in the effort to prohibit intoxicating drinks in Oregon. In 1852, the first temperance convention was held in Salem.<sup>19</sup> This convention was backed by the religious support that grew to fight liquor in Oregon. The main goal of this convention was to adopt a constitution. The overall message of the group's aim was a pledge "to use all practicable means to prevent by the law the traffic in intoxicating liquors."<sup>20</sup> From the

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid, 7.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Caswell, 235.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 244.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 245.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

meeting, the group tried to assist with the formation of other temperance groups. In December 1855, the executive committee of the Territorial Temperance Society, a branch from the early meeting in Salem, drew up a bill for state wide prohibition. "It was laid on the table by a vote of 16-11, and there perished."<sup>21</sup> The people who opposed the bill had ties in the liquor business and were brewery, distillery, and saloon owners. These early meetings helped set the stage for later temperance movements and helped lead Oregon into prohibition in 1915. These early meetings served as a backbone for later movements and from these, Oregon was seen as a place where prohibition would eventually take place. The Territorial Temperance Society saw that there was already great support for anti-liquor legislation and strides made forth for prohibition in Oregon. The question of prohibition was not the only issue in Oregon at the time; however, many saw that through prohibition it would create a society with less crime, domestic abuse, neglect and accidents.

On June 15, 1883 the most prominent temperance union was organized, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). The WCTU almost single-handedly brought prohibition to the state of Oregon. The first meeting was held in Portland in 1883 and aimed at breaking the state of Oregon into six districts. The overall message delivered at the conference was "that the members of this convention refuse to deal with those who deal in intoxicating drink;" this served as their back bone in the efforts to bring about prohibition.<sup>22</sup> From 1800-1900, The Oregon Woman's Christian Temperance Union grew in membership. During this time period there was a tug of war going between the WCTU and legislators in trying to get a temperance bill at the capital. These

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<sup>21</sup> Caswell, 247.

<sup>22</sup> Additon, 6.

were long, drawn out battles; Additon explains, “Father above, we are still here and here to stay, until a moral cycle sweeps our country and state and annihilates the liquor traffic.”<sup>23</sup> The WCTU would not give up its fight for prohibition until a bill was passed at the capital. Their aim was to manufacture public sentiment in the direction of temperance. They came up with the idea of home versus the saloon.<sup>24</sup> There was a need to raise awareness about alcohol and the effects it had on the family. Alcohol was destroying the family and wrecking the Christian values of which Oregon was founded on. The call of God and humanity helped gather more women to the movements because they felt the abuses of alcohol at home and on the family. The WCTU called upon the women of Oregon for prohibition to save their families and way of life before it was too late.

It is very easy to see why the Disciples of Christ decided to come to Oregon in 1854, and, more importantly, Monmouth. They had been given a land grant in Oregon from the Christian Church in Cameron, Illinois. The idea of free land coupled with Oregon’s long history of trying to control liquor issues made the Disciples’ choice to come to Oregon an easy one. This long history of liquor issues was seen through Hudson Bay Company legislation, temperance movements and Oregon Territory legislation. The Disciples came to Oregon with the idea of prohibiting alcohol in their newly founded town. The Disciples helped bring the liquor question into the public light when the first town charter in 1859 prohibited it.

To educate their youth in the fundamentals of the Christian religion, the Disciples of Christ founded Monmouth University in 1856. The university focus was a place for

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 15.

men and women alike to be schooled in the science of living and in the fundamental principles of religion. The university rules promoted this sober, religious lifestyle.<sup>25</sup> This idea of a sober and Christian lifestyle became a rallying call to keep prohibition. An example of this sober and Christian lifestyle can be explained through the rules and regulations in the college's first handbook, which read "That he or she do not visit a drinking saloon, attend any ball, billiard saloon, or any other place of amusement."<sup>26</sup> From the start, the college tried to prohibit the consumption and sale of alcohol on the campus. Abstaining from unnecessary activities such as drinking and dancing, would allow people to focus their efforts on improving culture through Christian unity and education.<sup>27</sup> The Disciples of Christ believed education could not take place in the presence of alcohol.

It was a considerable feat that in 147 years of prohibition in Monmouth there were only several exceptions when liquor was sold in the town. There was a time in the early 1900s, when one could obtain a drink in Monmouth if they were local and knew the drill. Charles Bowman remembered that when he was a boy the proprietors of the hardware store in Monmouth kept a barrel of whiskey in the back room.<sup>28</sup> He said "that the knowledgeable could walk through the store to the back room, drop a quarter in one cup, fill the other cup from the barrel and knock back a stiff drink."<sup>29</sup> Even though Monmouth was dry, there were still places to get a drink. Not everyone in Monmouth came from a Christian background or prided themselves on prohibition. Some had to

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<sup>25</sup> Gary Huxford and Ellis A. Stebbins, *Since 1856: Historical Views of College at Monmouth* (Monmouth: Western Oregon State College, 1996.), 219.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Lester G. McAllister and William E. Tucker, *Journey in Faith: A History of the Christian Church* (St Louis: Bethany Press, 1975), 22.

<sup>28</sup> McArthur, 28.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

find a drink in Monmouth because the nearest saloon was in Independence. Others had illegal stills in the basements of their homes, which saved them the trip to Independence. These types of bootleg businesses offered relief to people looking for a quick drink. However, most people who wanted to purchase a drink legally simply drove to Independence, because it was perfectly legal to purchase a drink in a bar or saloon there.

There is a difference between Monmouth and Independence on the issue of liquor. Some locals considered Independence “The Hop Center of the World.” The first business in Independence had been a saloon.<sup>30</sup> Many seasonal workers migrated to Independence to work the hops fields. Liquor was at the heart of Independence. It was no surprise when in 1914 Independence opposed prohibition 452 to 306. The rest of Polk County, including Monmouth, voted in favor of the measure by nearly a two-to-one margin.<sup>31</sup> Independence throughout time helped support Monmouth’s drinking habits by allowing the consumption and selling of intoxicants to Monmouth residents. Independence was seen as a refugee for the town’s drunks. Monmouth liked having the next town over sell intoxicants because the city’s law enforcement did not have to deal with the problems that came along with the selling of intoxicants.

As it turned out, the next big exception when alcohol was allowed in Monmouth was in August of 1933, when the OLCC (Oregon Liquor Control Committee) repealed all city ordinances and charter provisions dealing with alcohol. This was caused by the repeal of Oregon’s constitutional prohibition amendment, and Oregon ratified the 21<sup>st</sup> amendment repealing national prohibition. This left the issue of prohibition to a state vote. This resulted in legal fumbles by the Monmouth City Council and in the temporary

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<sup>30</sup> Jansson, 343.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

but legal sale of beer in Monmouth. The OLCC required that any local jurisdiction that wanted to stay dry first had to vote to stay dry and follow state law in conducting the vote.<sup>32</sup> It seems like Monmouth voters felt that they should stay dry because of the no vote to keep prohibition. The city of Monmouth called a special election on the liquor issue. The special election addressed the issue of the repeal of prohibited sale of intoxicants and whether the sale of 3.2 percent beer should be permitted. The residents voted “no” on the special election in October, with the result 203 to 87.<sup>33</sup> The OLCC controlled the issue, and just because Monmouth voted “no,” it first had to pass a state vote. This outraged the town because the issue of prohibition in Monmouth could be decided by a state vote. The rest of the state was against prohibition and many felt that the majority of the state would not vote in favor of prohibition. The state sided with Monmouth and allowed Monmouth to continue on with prohibition.

One person took advantage of this newly created loophole in the system, G.L “Sam” Russell. He owned a pool hall upstairs over the Mulkey grocery store located on Main Street, and got a license from the OLCC to sell packaged beer in June 1935. Many residents said “that Russell sold beer, by the bottle and his license was for package sales only and if you wanted to drink it you had to drink it in the next room over.”<sup>34</sup> This caused much discussion in Monmouth. Russell’s pool hall was boycotted by many people who did not want alcohol in Monmouth, and Russell’s business nearly dropped in half because of the boycott. Many people said they would not support a business where packaged beer was available. There was much hatred towards Russell for going behind the back of the city to get a liquor license, even though it was perfectly legal. The

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> McArthur, 31.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

church members of the community tried to petition the OLCC ruling, but they were not successful. There was nothing that could be done until Russell's license ran out on December 31, 1935. Russell's license was only good up till the end of the year; after that year he had to apply for a new license if he wanted to continue to sell packaged beer. This issue caused Russell so much stress that he did not try to renew his license again. Monmouth had to wait until the November 1936 election to vote on the issue of prohibition because it was too late to call for a special election on the issue. Monmouth once again voted to stay dry, and the state held its formal election and recognized Monmouth as being a dry town. Others could have taken advantage of the situation, but many saw the stress and problems that were associated with the selling of beer and did not want to deal with it.

Growing unrest in the 1960s and 1970s brought change across the country. This was a time when people tried to challenge old traditions and make history themselves. This drastic thinking could be felt in Monmouth, Oregon, as well as across the country. The radical ideas being brought to Monmouth tried get the sale of alcohol to pass voters. This was only radical thinking through the people of Monmouth's eyes, because the rest of the country allowed the sale of liquor and did not think of allowing the sale of liquor to be radical. The issue was brought up in the election of 1960. The citizens decided to circulate a liquor petition to get liquor containing less than 14 percent alcohol to be sold.<sup>35</sup> This petition caused a great deal of criticism. Inter-church committees were drawn up to defeat the petition and not allow it to come to a vote. In the past similar petitions had been drawn up to sell packaged beer and all had been defeated.

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<sup>35</sup> "Petition Places Liquor Question on City Ballot," *Monmouth Herald*, 8 September, 1960, 1.



In the weeks leading up to the ballot, support for the measure to allow the sale of packaged beer decreased. The petition lacked the number of valid signatures required to be brought to a vote. The petition had to contain no less than 10 percent of registered voters.<sup>36</sup> In the last count of registered voters, there were 913, according to the city council clerk Betty Adams, and there needed to be 92 valid signatures to be brought to a vote.<sup>37</sup> The petition only had 90 valid signatures. There were more signatures than needed to pass; however, many of them were not valid. Many were unregistered voters, used a wrong name, or people signed the petition twice. Many authorities agreed that it was a blessing that the petition did not pass, and it saved many headaches. If stores were allowed to sell beer and wine, what would be stopping a tavern or saloon from opening its doors in Monmouth? The petition did not pass and it preserved the status quo of being a dry town with no taverns or saloons. It wasn't the idea of allowing beer or wine, but the prevention of liquor establishments' opening in Monmouth. This failed petition illustrated how the city of Monmouth would go to great measures to defeat a petition and a vote on alcohol. An example of this is that the city went to great lengths trying to protect Monmouth's dry status, even going as far as checking every name for technicalities. If they did not check every name, the vote might have taken place, and Monmouth might have voted against prohibition.

It seemed ironic that even though because Monmouth was a dry town, it still had the same liquor problems of other towns. Monmouth did not receive any funds from the state's liquor tax because of their dry status. The state awarded a portion of the tax revenue based on population; none was awarded to Monmouth since it was a dry town.

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<sup>36</sup> "Signer Lack to Void Petition On Liquor Sale," *Monmouth Herald*, 15 September, 1960, 1, 6.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

In 1967, Scott McArthur, the town lawyer, said that the town should be receiving \$17,000.<sup>38</sup> McArthur argued that the funds for the tax would go for police protection against alcohol related crimes. A great deal of beer was consumed in Monmouth, and the Independence liquor store was known to get a lot of business from the citizens of Monmouth. The money from the tax would help the police department fight to get the drunks off the street.<sup>39</sup> Monmouth had a lot of liquor related calls, and the funds would have helped support the police department in responding to these calls. This would be a long, drawn out fight. McArthur used garbage collector's testimony to help win the case. Ed Brandt, the company owner of Brandt's Sanitary Service, stated "garbage collectors pick up more liquor bottles per capita than any other Polk County city."<sup>40</sup> McArthur battled the courts and helped Monmouth receive its fair share of the tax money, to help protect and keep Monmouth a dry clean town. This shows how the people of Monmouth would go to great measures to fund their police force to battle the city's alcohol problem. Without the extra funds, the Monmouth police department could not have responded to these calls because of the lack of money to cover overtime pay. With the money now in hand, it allowed the police department to be on full watch against liquor related crimes and incidents.

Despite Monmouth being a dry town, it still had the same liquor problems of other towns. In 1969, *the Oregon Daily Journal* made the point "Dry Monmouth Has Booze Problems". There were a number of growing problems on the issue of prohibition. Each weekend the number of beer cans found around town continued to grow.<sup>41</sup> More

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38 "Dry Monmouth Asks Liquor Funds Share," *Statesman*, 18 October, 1968, 6.

39 Ibid.

40 "Dry Monmouth Asks Liquor Funds," *Statesman*, 30 January, 1969, 2: 18.

41 "Dry Monmouth Has Booze Problems," *Oregon Daily Journal*, 18 June, 1969, 2.

and more people continued to ask for a drink. A waitress in a local restaurant said “she has to turn people down who ask for a beer with their dinner.”<sup>42</sup> The people of Monmouth that were in favor of repealing the prohibition law were getting edgier, and tried to form a group to help win the fight against prohibition. The students of OCE were tired of the prohibition law. Many complained about how Monmouth was a boring town without liquor being sold locally. Also, if liquor was sold in town then students could drink in an establishment closer to Monmouth, and would not have to worry about driving back from Independence. Students over the age of twenty-one could legally drink, but many of them wanted an establishment in town to drink at. Many students were under the impression that if a liquor establishment opened in Monmouth, it would create more of a night life.

It is important to note that it was not illegal to drink in Monmouth. The city’s law stated that liquor was not allowed to be sold, but could be consumed in Monmouth if you were of age. Possession of liquor was not illegal unless you were underage. Students were also challenging laws, and were often confused on how the laws were written. This held true for the court case known as the Monmouth Eight. Twenty-three OCE students were arrested because they violated state liquor laws. City officials complained about students not understanding city laws versus state laws and resulted in the protest of the arrested and trial of 23 students.<sup>43</sup> The students were brought to trial because they were in possession of liquor and they were not of legal age. The students confused state law with local law. The students thought they were able to have liquor, because they did not purchase it in Monmouth. However, it is against state law for anyone under 21 to possess

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> “Students Jam Courtroom in Monmouth Liquor Case,” *Statesman*, 7 February, 1970, 1: 9.

or consume liquor. The reason for the arrest is because they violated state laws, not city ones. Over 100 students packed the court room to show their support for the students who were arrested. Many students were against the idea of prohibition and any case involving alcohol was a chance to voice their opinions. Three of the eight students pleaded innocent before municipal Judge George Cooper. The students were charged with being minors in possession of liquor and fifteen other students were arrested in an apartment raid.<sup>44</sup> Sixteen of the students pleaded guilty and were fined \$25.<sup>45</sup> There were signs of support outside the court room, which said “free the students”.

Only eight of the convicted twenty three students were brought to trial, the rest pled guilty or were freed of charges. During the trial a number of spectators would cheer and laugh as Judge Cooper talked. He responded with the quote: “We need respect for the law around here, and quieted the crowd”.<sup>46</sup> This showed the disrespect and radical change that was going on around the country. Before this time in history, it was very unlikely for students to be disrespectful of an authority figure. Judge Cooper found all eight students guilty. The students were fighting the case, because they thought they could not get a MIP if the city law stated that alcohol is prohibited. Judge Cooper said “This goes beyond city law, and is state law,” and the students had broken a state law and had been brought to trial on it.<sup>47</sup> The eight students had to pay the \$25 like the rest of the students that pled guilty, and were put on probation by the school. School officials did not support underage drinking. This case would go down as one of the first cases that students of the school rose up against state and local liquor laws. The end of the 1960s

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> "The Strange Case of the Monmouth 8," *OCE Lamron*, 13 February, 1970, 2.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

and the start of the 1970s would have many changes in store. College kids started to rise up against local and state governments, and stand up for what they believed in, right or wrong. This shows how the times were changing; before this time in history it was very unlikely for college students to challenge state and local laws.

With the intention of trying to get an amendment to the city charter in 1972, Bob Webster, the owner of Webster Mayfair Market, failed in doing so. He was met with much resistance from the city. People stopped coming into his store and business dropped. His store was subjected to a boycott that reduced his weekly revenue from thirty thousand to nine thousand dollars.<sup>48</sup> Some people even went as far to picket outside the store. He realized that the business losses were too great to further his amendment run, and did not submit the petition that he had been circulating around. Within three years, Webster had withdrawn his petition and sold his store. This goes to show how the people of Monmouth would cut ties with local business if they were in favor of becoming wet. Many in Monmouth wanted nothing do with alcohol and went to great lengths to keep it that way, even forcing a local business owner out.

Monmouth had always taken pride in being the last dry town in Oregon and the last one west of the Mississippi. The residents who supported prohibition liked the idea of not having the problems associated with taverns and bars. They did not have to deal with the local town drunk as most places did with bars and saloons. All of Monmouth's drunks went to Independence to drink at the local watering hole. Monmouth was a good college town that did not have college town problems because of its dry status.<sup>49</sup> Monmouth did have a few college student related liquor problems, but overall as a

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<sup>48</sup> Jansson, 346.

<sup>49</sup> "Monmouth: Dry But Proud," *Lamron*, 26 September, 1974, 17.

college town went it had none. This goes to show that Monmouth is proud to be a dry town with a religious background. The people of Monmouth were always in favor of keeping their traditional ways and keeping Monmouth a dry town, as shown in the previous votes on the issue.

It was no surprise that 1976 would go down in Monmouth's history. Monmouth had other issues besides prohibition, but prohibition was an important issue that gave Monmouth its identity. This was the first time in more than 22 years that voters decided on whether they would like to have alcoholic beverages sold in the city.<sup>50</sup> Gary Houck, a local merchant, started the petition around Monmouth and received 304 signatures; only 237 were needed to be on the ballot. The reason for the petition was a survey that reported 85 percent of OCE dorm residents consumed alcohol and went to Independence to purchase it.<sup>51</sup> Houck was a local merchant and realized that he was losing money because he could not sell alcohol, and that the rest of the town was suffering economically from it. He thought that the students would have voted in favor of becoming wet. This was the first vote on the issue of prohibition since the legal voting age became 18. Many of the students drank and went across town to purchase liquor, Houck looked at this as a way to bring an end to prohibition and make a quick buck in the process. Houck charged that the ordinance was archaic and discriminated against business such as restaurants and grocery stores, for which liquor sales can produce a significant part of the profits.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> "Monmouth voters will have a chance to decide for the first time in 22 years whether or not they would like to have alcoholic beverages sold in the city," *Polk Sun*, 8 September, 1976, 1.

<sup>51</sup> Jansson, 345.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

Every time a vote took place on whether to allow the sale of liquor in Monmouth before 2002, Monmouth voted in favor of prohibition. Every time more and more people voted to keep Monmouth dry. In the other 4 elections to keep Monmouth a dry town in 1933, 1936, 1950 and 1954 the votes in favor for prohibition continued to grow. Even as the rest of the country allowed the sale of alcohol, the city of Monmouth stood alone on its beliefs about prohibition. The 1976 vote sought to have a different outcome. This was the first time in such an election, a majority of the college's students were able to vote, but that did not necessarily mean they would vote against prohibition. People against prohibition were known as the "Wets" and people for prohibition were known as "Drys".<sup>53</sup> Battles lines were drawn up for the epic vote of 1976. The Wets saw this as their chance to end prohibition in Monmouth.

There were many groups against Wets in the fight to end prohibition. One group that opposed the measure was the local WCTU chapter, one of the last to exist in Oregon.<sup>54</sup> They were afraid that alcohol would wreck the city, and undermine the religious principals that the city was founded on. They also believed that it would hurt family life in Monmouth. They argued that it would hurt the quality of life and that it was morally wrong.<sup>55</sup> The WCTU gathered great support in the battle against prohibition. Others that opposed prohibition were business owners, and some members of local churches. They raised religious, moral and economic issues along with two new arguments: the historic nature of Monmouth's prohibition and the uniqueness that local prohibition brought to the town.<sup>56</sup> Many business men shied away from the issue, and

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> "In Response WCTU Will Rally Forces," *Polk Sun*, 8 September, 1976, 8.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Jansson, 339.

made no comment. They were afraid of losing business and making local customers unhappy. A writer in the *Polk Sun* supporting a change in the law commented that “most people do not have anything against alcohol, and if we go wet we would be just like any other town. It is like being the only folks on the block with an Edsel.”<sup>57</sup> The people against prohibition believed in keeping tradition alive, and maintaining the quality of life that Monmouth had always known. A major point that the prohibitionists argued was that property values would be lowered and the image of quiet, non-alcoholic Monmouth would be spoiled. The reason for this is that if liquor establishments were to be allowed in Monmouth, and then the people associated with these establishments would move in, causing property values to decrease. There was an idea that lower class people are the ones who frequent taverns and saloons. They believed Monmouth was a unique town that set its self apart from other town with their prohibition law. The town was the only town in Oregon that still held true to the founding principals which it was founded on: prohibiting the sale of liquor.

City officials were concerned that college students of OCE could change the outcome of the vote. More than 85 percent of dorm residents drank liquor and half of them could vote in the election of 1976. Student’s opinions were split on the issue. Some students said that campus life would be much better if alcohol was sold in town; there would be more things to do. Other students came to Monmouth because of the prohibition law. Being in a dry town incubated a less stressful and better learning environment for students. Many students went to Independence to purchase liquor and brought it back to Monmouth. There were plenty of opportunities to purchase liquor; just not in Monmouth. One student said “he was voting on keeping Monmouth dry because

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.



Monmouth is unique and because OCE started out as a Christian college.”<sup>58</sup> In past elections, many students did not even vote. The 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment in 1971 lowered the voting age from twenty-one to eighteen. If the majority of OCE student who drank voted in the election, Monmouth might have went dry because of the students' vote. The students of OCE could have changed the fate of Monmouth and went against every principle that Monmouth was founded on. The students chose to respect those values and not vote against prohibition, or maybe did not vote in the election; the fact is the students did not play a major factor in deciding the fate of Monmouth.

On the 1976 vote, there was a lot of word confusion on the ballot about what each side meant. There were two ways to vote on the issue. The ballot explained the issue at hand, the sale of any alcohol beverage more than one half of a percent of alcohol per volume; this part was easy to understand. The yes or no part was not. The ballot made it seem like if you voted yes were in favor of prohibition and people who voted no were against it. In reality a yes vote was against prohibition and a no vote was for prohibition.<sup>59</sup> The confusion was solved by local newspapers such as the *Polk Sun* and *Monmouth Herald* who told voters what the ballot really meant. This was a major election on a huge issue, and it was important that everyone be informed on what was really being said.

The 1976 vote received the most resounding defeat of any of the five prohibition measures on which Monmouth citizens have voted. The vote was nearly a four-to-one margin at 1,764 to 486.<sup>60</sup> These numbers indicate that many college students who consumed alcohol did not vote, because if they did vote there would have been more on

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<sup>58</sup> Jansson, 339.

<sup>59</sup> "A Yes Vote Is A No Vote," *Polk Sun*, 15 September, 1976, 1.

<sup>60</sup> Jansson, 339.

the side to give up prohibition. People who liked the uniqueness of living in a dry town did not want to give up prohibition. The conservatives of Monmouth had won, and prohibition stayed. There was little talk of prohibition after the vote. Some merchants were still upset about the vote and still believed that prohibition stunted the town's commercial growth. Businesses did not want to move into a dry town and the people did not want new businesses to move in. If a new business moved in there might be a call to end prohibition, because these new people moving in would not have the close ties to prohibition like most people in Monmouth did. Most people were happy with the outcome, because they still had their community and traditions. Monmouth faced this vote and once again remained dry with the most support on a vote that the city had seen. This silenced further discussion about the overturn of prohibition.

In 1967, Monmouth contained four grocery stores, and out of the four stores only one managed to stay in business. The only store that was able to stay in business was Market Place. Having a profitable a grocery store is difficult without beer and wine. One wholesale grocery executive said “ that in some stores beer and wine sales could amount to 40 percent of gross, he marvels how anyone in the highly competitive grocery business keep a store in operation without beer and wine.”<sup>61</sup> After 1967 the Market Place had five owners. This exemplifies the high turnover rate; without being able to sell beer and wine it was nearly impossible for a grocery store to stay in business in Monmouth. This shows the need from a business owner perspective that beer and wine is imperative to run a prosperous business. This idea of not having a true grocery store in Monmouth would later serve as the backbone for the 2002 campaign to allow the sale of alcohol in Monmouth.

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<sup>61</sup> McArthur, 33.

Monmouth stayed dry for number of factors. Many residents of Monmouth supported prohibition because it created a pleasant community to reside and live in. As one resident stated “The residents take sort of a perverse delight in their singular notoriety”.<sup>62</sup> The students of Western Oregon University were intrigued by the town’s prohibition. Western Oregon University is formally known as OCE. There was a real sense of history felt by the university students; they took pride in going to a school in a town where prohibition was still in existence. Many students were proud of the strong heritage that Monmouth had as being a dry town. In fact, many students partook in projects trying to raise the awareness of the dangers and the abuse of alcohol. They felt it was their need to give back to the community by doing projects and presentations of the history of prohibition in Monmouth. The former librarian Lotte Larsen prepared a notebook of newspaper articles related to Monmouth’s prohibition, because it was such a popular research topic. Prohibition is the center of Monmouth’s identity. From 1994 to 2000, Monmouth hosted an annual Purely Victorian Tea Festival. The slogan of the Festival was at the center of Monmouth’s identity: “When it’s wet it’s dry in Monmouth”.<sup>63</sup> This really shows the uniqueness of Monmouth and was a celebration of the city’s ties with prohibition. The festival celebrated Monmouth’s history of prohibition and helped show the uniqueness of Monmouth to the rest of Oregon

In 2000, Monmouth’s only full service grocery store closed down and the debate about prohibition started up again. The people of Monmouth now were forced to drive to the next town, Independence, to purchase groceries. This, along with claims that prohibition had reduced property values and no new grocery stores could make it in a

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<sup>62</sup> Jansson, 347.

<sup>63</sup> Jansson, 349.

town that still had prohibition, led to the heated debate whether to give prohibition.<sup>64</sup>

The sentiment against the sale of alcohol in Monmouth began to wane.

In 2002 a petition started to circulate on the issue of prohibition. This petition had economic interests and tried to improve the quality of life in Monmouth. The measure was put on the ballot on at the November 2002 general election. The petition was started by current Mayor John Oberst. The reason why Oberst started the petition against the prohibition law was “the only purpose I see it serving is driving money out of Monmouth, driving business out of Monmouth.”<sup>65</sup> Businesses were not attracted to Monmouth because of the “dry status” and saw the history of the city in which many were forced to shut down because of prohibition. Monmouth was at an economic disadvantage compared to other towns in Polk County because of prohibition. Polk County has a number of vineyards and Monmouth had no hope of opening a tasting room as long as the law is an existence.<sup>66</sup> This helps show that if the prohibition law was lifted than there would be many new business opportunities created. The aim at passing the 2002 vote thought to allow new business opportunities in Monmouth.

There was opposition to this petition, since not everyone was for the repeal of the prohibition law. Many students and their parents chose to attend Western Oregon University because the town was dry. One student said “students think it is a safer than a larger university where alcohol is more of an influence.”<sup>67</sup> This petition split the campus in two on the issue of prohibition in Monmouth. Many local business owners opposed to this petition and vote. For example, Jamie Rust, the owner of Main Street Pizza said

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> “Some In Monmouth Want ‘Dry Law’ To Go By The Wayside,” *Oregonian*, 26 May, 2002, 21.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

“once the doors are open to beer and wine, a national pizza franchise will move into town.”<sup>68</sup> Many new businesses would move into Monmouth and force the locally owned ones out. Most opposition came from college students and local business owners. There was little religious opposition to the petition. Larry Kribbs, pastor at the Faith Lutheran Church said “It’s minutes away if people want to buy it in Independence so it’s a moot question in my mind.”<sup>69</sup> The religious identity of Monmouth and the call to keep prohibition from this identity had changed.

Many people liked the prospect of being able to buy groceries without driving to the next town. The vote came down to the fact of not having a grocery store in town and the economic call to end prohibition. It was seen as hassle to drive to the next town over to purchase groceries. The only chance the town had of getting a grocery store was to end prohibition. No grocery store would even think about moving into Monmouth without being able to sell liquor. This is based on past history where all of the former grocery stores closed down in Monmouth because they could not make a decent profit with prohibition in existence. The measure passed on the 2002 vote and Monmouth was the last town in Oregon to give up prohibition.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid

<sup>69</sup> Ibid

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